



BOOKS



SECTION EIGHT

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, MAY 7, 1922.

SIXTEEN PAGES.

E. H. HARRIMAN, MASTER OF RAILROADS

A Survey by Judge WILLARD BARTLETT.

E. H. HARRIMAN: A BIOGRAPHY.
By George Kennan. In 2 volumes.
Houghton, Mifflin Company.

THE first thought which occurs to the reviewer of the narrative contained in these two handsomely printed volumes is the question whether the personality portrayed therein deserves so elaborate a memoir. There is no doubt the answer must be in the affirmative, if the reader is able to accept Mr. Kennan's estimate of Mr. Harriman's character. The man presented to us in this book is no mere selfish money-maker, but a financier of rare sagacity and foresight, whose chief purpose in life was to manage the great railroad lines in which his earnings were invested in such a way as to make their properties most serviceable to the public for whose use and benefit they were primarily designed. If this view be correct—and Mr. Kennan makes out a pretty strong case for it—Edward H. Harriman was anything but the "undesirable citizen" of President Roosevelt's indignant rhetoric. On the contrary, he was a patriotic American who deserved well of the State.

Assuming, then, that Mr. Kennan has appraised his character and ambition correctly, this biography must be deemed a worthy memorial of an extraordinary man. A boy who leaves school at the age of 14, goes into Wall Street as a broker's office boy at a salary of \$5 a week, becomes a millionaire before attaining middle age, and gives his native State a million dollars and ten thousand acres of land for a public park when he dies at the age of 61 may well be regarded as an exceptional personality whose life story is worth telling. Not only does such a man deserve some recognition of the generosity to the community manifested in such a gift, but his achievement of success in finance is so unusual that a record of his career ought to abound in useful and interesting lessons for the innumerable young Americans who look upon Wall Street as the Promised Land of opportunity for the ambitious youth of America. If Edward H. Harriman, the poor son of a poor clergyman, can thus succeed, they ask, why may not we go and do likewise?

II.

Mr. Kennan's narrative of the son's life is not chronological throughout, but is arranged in subdivisions, each dealing with a notable achievement, undertaking or controversy. The ancestry of Edward H. Harriman was English; it is not traced further back here than his great-grandfather, William Harriman, a well-to-do stationer in London, who came from Bristol to this country in 1795 and five years later established himself as a merchant in New York, trading with the West Indies. He was prosperous enough to be known as "the rich Englishman." A son named Orlando carried on the business successfully for many years after his death; but the fortunes of the family suffered much in the great fire of 1837. A second Orlando Harriman, son of the first, was the father of Edward Henry Harriman, who was born on February 20, 1848, in the Protestant Episcopal rectory at Hempstead, Long Island. This Orlando was graduated at Columbia College with distinction in 1835, and became a clergyman of only moderate attainments, except in the choice of a wife, Cornelia Neilson, the daughter of a prominent physician in New Jersey. "She was a woman of strong and well balanced character," says Mr. Kennan, "and from her, rather than from the Rev. Orlando Harriman, Mr. Edward H. Harriman seems to have inherited his business ability." His

father went out to California at the time of the first great gold discoveries there, to accept a call from a mountain parish, but he was delayed so long on the voyage out that he found another rector in charge when he reached his destination, and he returned to New York disappointed and disconsolate on the 18th of April, 1851, when his boy was three years old. "It would perhaps have afforded him some consolation," says that son's biographer, "as he thus returned unsuccessful from his first great venture, if he could have foreseen that in that same month of April, just fifty-five years later, his baby son, Edward Henry, would start from New York for the Far Western State where he himself had failed, and would there put his wealth, his power and the resources of his two great railway systems at the service of the people of San Francisco, when they had been ruined and made homeless by earthquake and fire."

Our information concerning the son's education is exceedingly meager. All we know is that it was acquired in the public schools of Jersey City, when his father settled there upon his return from the Pacific coast, and at Trinity School in New York. His schooling ended when his business career began, at the age of 14, as a messenger at a salary of \$5 a week in the Stock Exchange house of D. C. Hays. It is probable that his recollections of Trinity School were pleasant; for his widow conveyed five and one-half acres of land in The Bronx to the school in 1914, to be used by the boys as an athletic field.

III.

In 1870 Edward H. Harriman began

business on his own account, purchasing a seat in the Stock Exchange with \$3,000 borrowed from his uncle, which he was able to repay within one year out of the broker's commissions which he earned in that period. After confining himself strictly to a commission business for three or four years he had accumulated sufficient capital to venture upon individual speculations in his own behalf. In 1874 he made \$150,000

by selling short when S. V. White, the well known Wall Street deacon of Plymouth Church, tried to corner anthracite stocks; but he lost most of it a little later in a bear campaign in Delaware and Hudson against John Jacob Astor. He was gaining invaluable knowledge and experience all this time, of course; but he is described as having been "nothing more than a skillful and prosperous Wall Street broker" during the period between 1876 and 1881, inclusive. The impulses and ideals which were eventually to make him a leader

the paper securities represented. In order to do this he needed large capital, and as he approached his thirtieth year he began to make and save money, not for its own sake, nor for the luxuries and pleasures it could give him, but rather for the use he could make of it as an instrument in the control and direction of the world's larger affairs. He wanted to act—to achieve—and the possession or control of capital was an indispensable prerequisite."

In 1879 Mr. Harriman married Miss Mary Williamson Averell of Ogdens-

burg, N. Y., the daughter of the leading banker in that city, who was president of the Ogdensburg and Lake Champlain Railroad Company. It is said that the first time E. H. Harriman's name ever appeared in connection with a railroad was when the workmen in this company's shops painted it upon the locomotive of the special train provided by the bride's father for the beginning of the wedding journey. His activities in the railroad field began with the purchase and reconstruction of the Sodus Bay and Southern Railroad and the sale of it to the Pennsylvania, 1881-1883. This transaction yielded him a handsome profit, which he attributed largely to the improvement in the physical condition of the line while he owned it, greatly enhancing its value to an intending purchaser. Thereafter up to the time of his death Mr. Harriman was a prominent figure in the greatest enterprises and controversies that agitated the American railway world—such as the extension and improvement of the Illinois Central, the reorganization of the

Union Pacific and its reconstruction and reequipment, the acquisition and reconstruction of the Southern Pacific and the rescue of the Erie from bankruptcy by personally taking up its short term notes to the amount of \$5,000,000. The details of these operations—some of them nothing less than gigantic—cannot be gone into in such a review as this. Indeed, it is only because Mr. Kennan's memoir of Mr.

Harriman is intended to be a defense of his conduct where it has been aspersed, as well as a biography in the best literary sense, that the author is justified in going into particulars as fully as he does. For all but the closest friends of Mr. Harriman, however, who may be interested in the most minute points in his favor, the broad defense of his railroad policies, as exemplified in his largest transactions, must be the proposition that his underlying motive has always been to render his roads more useful, beneficial and remunerative than they were before he assumed control.

IV.

As is well known, Mr. Harriman was a party to many controversies and often suffered from the bitter enmity of prominent men. Two chapters in the second volume of this biography are devoted to a consideration of his break with President Roosevelt, which followed some correspondence between them concerning campaign funds in the general election of 1904. It is impossible to pronounce judgment upon this incident without imputing blame or at least serious error to some one or more persons, all of whom are now dead. No attempt has been made, therefore, in this notice of Mr. Kennan's biography of Mr. Harriman to determine to what extent President Roosevelt was justified in turning against his former friend, if, indeed, he was justified at all. The most that need be said on this painful subject is that if the facts were what Mr. Kennan supposes them to have been, the President had no real cause to think ill of Mr. Harriman. Every lawyer and judge of experience knows how many of the bitterest controversies in the world have been due simply to the careless misapprehension of hasty utterances—misapprehensions which could have been avoided by a little less hurry and a little more candor. Mr. Harriman seldom paid any attention to detraction—not that he was cynically indifferent to abuse, but because, like Lincoln, he said he did not have time enough to devote half his life to quarrels. "The people," he believed, "always find out what's what in the end, and I can afford to wait." Mr. Kennan has done for him in these volumes what he would not do for himself by way of defense.

Edward H. Harriman is honored in San Francisco for the organizing genius and energy which he brought to the relief of the city after the earthquake and fire of 1906; he deserves to be honored in New York for setting on foot in 1876 the Boys' Club on the East Side, which had its origin in a conference between him and three boys from the street, and when it reached its full development eleven years ago numbered 6,000 members and owned \$300,000 worth of property. It appears to have been the first organization of the kind ever successfully undertaken anywhere.

What quality or achievement was it in the personality or life of Edward H. Harriman that did most to distinguish him among his fellow men? This question will naturally occur to every thoughtful reader as he comes to the end of this voluminous biography. Mr. Kennan does not answer the question categorically; but he supplies abundant material to enable others to do so. The salvation of sick or disabled railroads for the benefit of their security holders and the public was the distinguishing achievement in Edward H. Harriman's career. Intellectual curiosity in regard to the methods by which the material property of a railway corporation could most advantageously be employed to make money for those whose savings were invested in their stock and bonds ap-

Continued on Following Page.



Edward H. Harriman.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page		Page
Edward H. Harriman, Master of Railroads. A Survey by Judge Willard Bartlett.....	1	The World of Letters as Others See It.....	9
The Iron Man in Industry.....	2	New Novels in Varied Form.....	
The Story of Sergeant York.....	2	Pierre and Luce—The Kingfisher—The	
The Blocking of Zeebrugge.....	2	Dark House—The First Person Singular—	
Literary Pilgrimages at Home and Abroad.....		The Haunting—The Unspeakable Gentle-	
VI. What Remains of Dickens's London.....		man—Lady Bountiful—Hidden Gold—Mud	
In Three Parts. Part III.....	3	Hollow—Plaster Saints—The Eight Strokes	
The Whispering Gallery. By Donald Adams.....	4	of the Clock—The Love Chase—A Son of	
Lloyd George and London Punch.....	4	the Sahara—The Yellow Poppy—Home-	
The Book Factory. By Edward Anthony.....	5	land.....	10-11-12-13
Wells on Wells.....	5	Phases of Constructive Religious Thought..	13
Recent Verse of Varying Values.....		American Books in Denmark.....	
By W. S. Moody.....	6	By Grace Isabel Colbrun.....	14
Odd Drama of Old Japan.....		"Immorality and the Critic." By Edna Kenton.	15
By Algernon Tassin.....	6	For Women Readers in the	
The Narcotic Problem.....	7	Current Magazines.....	15
Chronicle and Comment.....		Books of the Week.....	15
By Arthur Bartlett Maurice.....	8	Conscientious Projectors—and Others.....	
Authors' Works and Their Ways.....	8	By Thomas L. Masson.....	16